

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ROWAN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING
WITH THE
ROWAN SALISBURY SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION
February 7, 2013 – 4:00 pm
Hood Theological Seminary – Multi Purpose Room
1810 Lutheran Synod Drive
Salisbury, NC 28146**

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Present: Jim Sides, Chairman
Craig Pierce, Vice-Chairman
Jon Barber, Member
Mike Caskey, Member
Chad Mitchell, Member

Clerk to the Board Carolyn Barger was also present.

Board of Education members in attendance were Chairman Dr. Richard Miller, Kay Wright Norman, Jean Kennedy, Susan Cox, L. A. Overcash, Joshua Wagner, and Charles Hughes. Also present were Superintendent Dr. Judy Grissom and Clerk to the Board Bonnie Holder.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Sides convened the meeting for the Board of Commissioners at 4:00 p.m.

OPENING PRAYER

Dr. Albert Aymer, President of Hood Theological Seminary, welcomed those in attendance and asked the two (2) boards to pull together in their endeavors. Dr. Aymer then provided the Invocation.

Board of Education member Chuck Hughes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Barber moved, Commissioner Pierce seconded and the vote to approve the agenda passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Agreement to Process for Discussion

Dr. Miller said it had been approximately seven (7) or eight (8) years since the Board of Commissioners (BOC) and the Board of Education (BOE) had jointly met. Dr. Miller said all voices in the room were equal and he wanted everyone to feel at ease in the effort to work and improve the relationship between the two (2) governing boards.

Chairman Sides expressed hope for positive results from the joint meeting.

2. Statement of Relationship Expectations From Each Board, Collectively and/or Individually

Dr. Miller provided a handout, which listed the relationship points the BOE members had previously identified as most important. The handout also listed points BOE members felt should be of mutual respect.

Chairman Sides felt one problem for both boards was the issue of money and he discussed the County's responsibilities as the taxing authority. Chairman Sides said the State passed its funding obligations to the counties, forcing counties to help pay for additional needs. Chairman Sides said it created tension when the BOE asked for more money than the County could give each year. Chairman Sides said each time the State cut the school system's funding, the BOE expected the County to pick up the tab. Chairman Sides said he respected the task of the BOE but felt there were differences of opinion in how the General Statutes were interpreted.

Chairman Sides continued by stating there were issues to discuss besides the central office, such as the BOE's projected budget shortfall. Chairman Sides went on to explain that during the tough economic times over the past five (5) years, the County had taken a proactive stance by cutting employees, implementing furlough days, etc. Chairman Sides said when discussing mutual respect, he looked at the County's mandated obligations. Chairman Sides said the County funded not only capital needs but to some degree current expenses for the BOE. Chairman Sides said he felt the current bond issue should be paid off before the County borrowed more money.

Chairman Sides concluded by stating he was open to additional meetings with the BOE and that both boards should work together to resolve the issues.

Mr. Hughes commented that the needs should be considered as opposed to wants.

Commissioner Pierce addressed a statement concerning the two (2) boards being equal. Commissioner Pierce said he did not have a problem saying the boards were equal when discussing school matters; however, he felt it should be understood the BOC had more on its plate than the school system.

Commissioner Pierce said the BOC also had to provide for the needs of numerous others such as the Sheriff's Department, Health Department, etc. Commissioner Pierce said the majority of the decisions pertaining to schools were left up to the BOE. Commissioner Pierce said taxation was the BOC's issue and the BOC did not have the money to give everyone what they asked for. Commissioner Pierce felt the two (2) boards would always have turmoil as long as the BOE expected the BOC to provide for its every want. Commissioner Pierce emphasized that the BOC's focus was not only on schools but on every citizen in the County and if that concept was understood, the boards would get along better.

Mr. Overcash said the BOC had a more complicated job than the BOE, as far as responsibilities to the citizens. Mr. Overcash said the BOE had a sense that the BOC micromanaged the BOE. Mr. Overcash said it was a BOE decision as to where school buildings go and it was a BOC decision to find the funding for them. Mr. Overcash said citizens held the BOE responsible for the school system and the BOE basically wanted to be able to run the school system the way it needed to.

Commissioner Pierce expressed hope that the central office was not the topic of discussion because as far as he was concerned, the BOC was out of that discussion.

Mr. Hughes said what mattered was how well the two (2) boards were doing their jobs.

Commissioner Caskey said there were defined roles for each board and each board had to adhere to state and federal mandates. Commissioner Caskey asked if there was a way to determine a dollar amount so that each year the BOE would know how much money it was going to receive.

Dr. Miller discussed four (4) cents on the current bond issue that had not yet been levied and said those funds could have been used for projects over the past few years. Dr. Miller also discussed grant monies for the early college program that were going to run out and he asked how the BOE would find funds to replace grant monies that had been proven to be effective.

Chairman Sides said he made no apologies for his votes to not raise taxes. Chairman Sides referred to the four (4) cents left on the bond and said the citizens' vote on the matter had been to allow an increase "up to" a certain amount but the increase is not mandated. Chairman Sides said the BOC could have raised taxes up to 6.7 cents and instead the BOC had made significant cuts to keep from raising taxes. Chairman Sides said he would only speak for himself and that he would not vote to raise taxes to allow the BOE to construct any building and he would not vote to give the BOE the lottery money. Chairman Sides said the lottery money would be used to pay down debt. Chairman Sides

proposed for 2016 to restructure all school debt, float a new bond issue for \$70 or \$80 million to build a number of schools, a central office and current capital needs.

Ms. Norman questioned the impact on the community due to the cuts the BOC had made to jobs and services. Chairman Sides responded that the answer to the problem was not to raise taxes because it did not help those who were unemployed and already could not pay their taxes.

In response to comments by Ms. Norman and Dr. Miller, Commissioner Pierce described information given to the BOC regarding the proposed central office as not genuine information. Commissioner Pierce said the BOC's decision to fund the central office had been based on the fact that the BOE would have a clean building site, which it did not. Commissioner Pierce continued by saying one of the BOC's tasks was to attract new businesses and he pointed out that raising taxes did not draw new business. Commissioner Pierce said he understood the BOE wanted to do the best it could for the children and the teachers. Commissioner Pierce said the BOC had to look at what was best for every citizen.

Mr. Overcash said the need would not go away and the BOC and BOE needed to figure out how to solve problems.

Commissioner Mitchell said it had been far too long since the two (2) boards had met. Commissioner Mitchell said communications should not occur in emails or the newspaper. Commissioner Mitchell said the boards' leadership should talk and if issues could not be resolved, the full Boards should meet. Commissioner Mitchell said the membership on the BOC and the BOE changed every two (2) years. Commissioner Mitchell said new boards are not bound by decisions of previous boards and issues should be worked on before it was close to time for an election.

Commissioner Mitchell said the BOC should figure out how much money per pupil it was willing to give and use that figure as a starting point. Commissioner Mitchell also felt the school system should have a fund balance and the two (2) boards should agree on a percentage for the fund balance.

Commissioner Barber said when companies were looking to expand in Rowan County, the educational system was a factor. Commissioner Barber agreed with Commissioner Mitchell that the school system should have a fund balance. Commissioner Barber said he felt the tension was due simply to the fact that the BOC and BOE had not met in six (6) years.

Ms. Cox felt the obvious issue was money. Ms. Cox also felt it was incumbent upon each member to work on terms of transparency, cooperation, listening, etc. Ms. Cox felt each board member could do a better job.

Mr. Wagner said there was no one present that did not care about education and the children. Mr. Wagner said because the BOC disagreed with the BOE regarding the central office did not mean the two (2) boards could not get along. Mr. Wagner also felt the school system should have a fund balance and the issue should be in writing so it would not have to be discussed again.

3. Agreement To Relationship Expectations and/or Strategies For How To Achieve Them

Dr. Miller stated that he and Chairman Sides would have a conversation regarding the per pupil funding level and also discuss the question of a fund balance for the school system. Dr. Miller said they would try to find common ground and bring the information back to both boards.

Chairman Sides said he would not appoint a committee and preferred the chairman and vice-chairman of each board meet, along with the Superintendent and County Manager. Chairman Sides said no decisions would be made at the meetings and the results from the discussions would be reported back to the respective boards. Chairman Sides said the meeting would not be open to the public and there would be no press in attendance. Chairman Sides felt the meeting should be closed where common issues could be discussed and brought back to both boards.

DISCUSSION OF COMMON ISSUES

Chairman Sides said the issue of money was not going away and it did not mean the BOC had not fulfilled its responsibility but rather the State had not fulfilled its responsibility. Chairman Sides felt a request should be made to the legislators to set a statewide policy that would require counties to give schools a percentage. Chairman Sides said without such a policy, funding would always be a problem. Chairman Sides said change should be sought that was common for all. Chairman Sides said if the school system was going to have a fund balance, he felt the legislators should also set the amount so there would be no disagreement.

Chairman Sides said he was willing to meet with the BOE Chair, Vice-Chair and Superintendent every other month.

Dr. Miller felt the boards' were at a good point to end the meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements from the Commission members.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, Commissioner Pierce moved to adjourn at 5:30 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Caskey and passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Barger, CMC, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board/
Assistant to the County Manager